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NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE DAILY CABLE

Thursday 16 February 1978

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NATIONAL SECURITY INFORMATION

Unauthorized Disclosure Subject to Criminal Sanctions

DIA review(s) completed.

State Dept. review completed

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USSR-EGYPT: Establishing a Dialogue

The Soviets are testing Egyptian willingness to establish a "constructive dialogue" between the two countries.

Some improvement in relations with Egypt is certainly desired by the Soviets. They continue to view that country as the most important Arab state politically and are anxious to end their exclusion from Middle East peace negotiations.

the Egyptians may still want to preserve the Soviet option. Sadat does not want a role for the USSR in Middle East negotiations at this time, but he probably accepts the fact that ultimately Moscow will be reintroduced into the process in some larger forum. In fact, Sadat and top Foreign Ministry officials have again begun in recent weeks to describe the Cairo and Jerusalem talks between Egypt and Israel as preparatory to a Geneva conference.

[] The communique issued after Sadat's recent visit to Romania said that participation of all interested parties in the Cairo political talks--or in meetings proposed by UN Secretary General Waldheim--would be useful preparation for a Geneva conference. The Romanians apparently pushed for the reintroduction of the USSR into the process.

[] Reference to Waldheim's proposal suggests that Sadat sees a possible need to extend the time frame of negotiations. The meetings proposed by Waldheim offer a possible forum for Syria, which has refused to take part in any negotiations arising from the Egyptian-Israeli talks, and for the USSR, which has strongly condemned them.

[] The Soviets have tried on various occasions in recent years to restore more cordial relations with the Egyptians. Shevchenko made a similar effort last year, but the current contact is the first since Sadat's peace initiative last November and the subsequent closing of the Soviet cultural centers and consulates in Egypt. Recent reporting has indicated a Soviet readiness to respond to an Egyptian gesture, and the Soviets have tried to avoid further exacerbating relations. []

ISRAEL: Rightwingers to Protest

Right-wing Israeli activists, who oppose Prime Minister Begin's peace proposals, are planning to challenge the government's West Bank settlements policy on Sunday. Rabbi Meir Kahane, a leader of the Jewish Defense League, has announced that his group and some Gush Emunim followers will attempt to take over a former hospital in the old Jewish quarter of the West Bank town of Hebron.

Kahane hopes to embarrass Begin, whom he has invited to attend the ceremony, and to undermine the Israeli cabinet's current efforts to exercise restraint in establishing new settlements on the West Bank. Kahane and Gush leaders made a similar attempt to convert the former hospital into a synagogue in the summer of 1976 but were forcibly removed by then - Prime Minister Rabin's government.

[] By advertising his intentions, which are openly at odds with government policy, Kahane probably has made it easy for Begin to head him off and assert the cabinet's authority on this matter. Kahane's provocative action could trigger Arab unrest in Hebron and damage Begin's credibility if the government fails to take prompt action to restrain the group. There have been several Arab demonstrations on the West Bank this month, apparently in reaction to Israeli settlement activity there. []